

Auckland youth worker who groomed 12-year-old girl sentenced to home detention

Devonte Mulitalo gave his victim a picture of them together so she could remember him.

A 23-year-old former youth worker has been sentenced to 11 months' home detention after coercing a 12-year-old girl to perform sex acts on him.

Devonte Vincent Mulitalo was sentenced on Monday at Auckland District Court after earlier admitting one charge of sexual connection with a young person under 16 and one charge of indecent communication.

Mulitalo groomed the young girl between December 2016 and July 2017 while the victim was in his care at an after school care programme run by Youthtown in Auckland, the court heard.

Sentencing him on Monday, Judge Mary Beth Sharp said Mulitalo would also be assessed to complete the SAFE sexual offenders programme and pay \$2000 in emotional reparation to his victim.

Judge Sharp also ordered Mulitalo's name to be placed on the Child Sex Offender Government Agency Registration, for the safety of young people and to also prevent him coming "into contact with youngsters, who you may otherwise be tempted by".

Devonte Vincent Mulitalo, 23, was sentenced at Auckland District Court on Monday. He was also banned from possessing any device with internet access.

Mulitalo's offending was discovered when staff who ran the Youthtown after school care programme found images on the victim's phone.

Mulitalo had also shared explicit photos and videos with the girl in social media and text messages. In those messages, he told her he loved her and asked her to send photos of herself to him.

The offending progressed and he began to touch the girl inappropriately and coerced her into perform sexual acts on him.

"I have before me a young man who has satisfied me of his extraordinary remorse and his insight in to his offending," Judge Sharp said.

"[The] overwhelming purpose of sentencing you, Mr Mulitalo, is to see that you are completely rehabilitated and you will not sexually offend in the future, I do have my worries that you are a paedophile," Judge Sharp.

Crown prosecutor Henry Steele read victim impact statements from the girl and her parents to the court on Monday.

In them, the victim said she felt it was all her fault and she had turned to self harm and had suicidal thoughts.

"It's embarrassing because it's taken so long and the way I've been treated makes me feel so angry," she said.

Her father said he couldn't hold back the tears when his daughter told him what Mulitalo had persuaded her to do.

He told the court he and his wife felt like they'd failed as parents.

"The effects this has had on our family were devastating and soul destroying and we were close to ending our marriage," he said.

"She [the victim] told me she wanted to kill herself and I had to constantly tell her that it wasn't her fault and that we loved her and that we would help her get through this," he said.

Steele told the court the offending was very serious and a pre-sentence report indicated Mulitalo had a moderate to high risk of re-offending.

"There is a continuing and ongoing risk to children and any children he comes in to close contact with," Steele said.

"This man was in a position of real responsibility and he used that position and that trust placed in him to offend against the victim.

"He ... groomed her and physically isolated her," Steele said.

As some of the details of the offending were read out, including the nature of what the victim was coerced into doing, Mulitalo shook his head in the dock.

Mulitalo's lawyer, Panama Le'au'anae, said before the offending, Mulitalo had returned to New Zealand from overseas before he was employed by Youthtown.

"There was a lack of insight on his part and maturity and he shouldn't have engaged in the way he did.

"He was only 21 at the time and that does not excuse his behaviour ... but could be why he went down that path," Le'au'anae said.

Le'au'anae said Mulitalo had expressed insight into his offending and would offer to pay \$1500 over time in reparation to the victim.

Youthtown chief executive Paula Kearns told *Stuff* she wanted to reiterate her sorrow at what happened and said her thoughts were with the family.

"As a team, we are shocked that a former staff member deliberately breached our comprehensive policies and procedures as well as our trust," she said.

"We are deeply dismayed that such a crime was committed in our programme as we work hard to ensure that our programmes are safe and welcoming places for young people," Kearns said.

Kearns said the organisation remained vigilant to ensure staff underwent the appropriate checks, including police vetting before starting employment.

"The safety and well-being of our participants is our highest priority," she said.

Youthtown has robust policies and procedures in places and those are regularly reviewed, Kearns said.

Where victims of sexual violence can get help:

- [Rape Crisis](#) - 0800 88 33 00 (24hr service), click link for information on local helplines
- [Victim Support](#) - 0800 842 846 (24hr service)

- [The Harbour](#), online support and information for people affected by sexual abuse
- [Women's Refuge](#) (Females only) - crisis line available on 0800 733 843
- [Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Trust](#) (Males only), Helplines across NZ, click to find out more
- If you are in danger, or are being subjected to sexual violence, call 111.